

HYPERALLERGIC

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IN INKY BLACKS AND EARTHY PASTELS, REGGIE BURROWS HODGES CRAFTS COLLECTIVE PORTRAITS

by Alexandra M. Thomas



Reggie Burrows Hodges, "Community Concern" (2020), acrylic and pastel on linen, 40 x 36 inches (all images courtesy the artist and Karma, New York)

In Reggie Burrows Hodges's worlds, everyone is in motion — jumping hurdles, dancing, farming, riding a bike. Still, the paintings inspire a sense of stillness and tranquility. Spread out along the walls at Karma, the artist's New York debut permits space for quiet reflection.

Within these vibrant portraits, unnamed figures undertake leisurely and arduous tasks in idyllic settings. Faces are blurred and imperceptible, yet somehow evoke a sense of intimacy rather than alienation. Without identifying facial characteristics, we instead focus on the subjects' actions and surroundings. The figures are rendered with soft edges and glowing colors, inviting viewers into their picturesque scenes.

"Community Concern" (2020) offers a glimpse of a Black woman, exuberantly posed and swinging her arms, dancing. Her peach-colored pants dazzle while her face is an inky black monochrome. This anonymity departs from the notion of a portrait's subject as an isolated individual and instead moves toward a collective sense of being, to which the title alludes.

Although Hodges was born in densely populated Compton, CA, he currently resides in Lewiston, Maine, a town more sparsely inhabited, where he is attuned to the earthy pastels of quaint rural New England landscapes. Works such as "On the Verge: Green Field" (2020) reflect the gentle tensions that illuminate Hodges' practice: his impressionistic style dwells somewhere between abstraction and figuration, evoking the history of Western portraiture by foregrounding the figure but depart from tradition by omitting all facial features.

Hodges remains concerned with the human figure although not preoccupied with marked individuality — a formal gesture that echoes the critiques of rugged individualism fundamental to Black resistance historically and today.